

**Freedom and Change – Coming to Terms  
with the End of the  
Anti - Apartheid Struggle in  
South Africa: A Case Study**

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is intended to promote an understanding of the challenges of transition faced by a multi-racial couple of South African anti-apartheid activists after the struggle ended. It aims to illustrate how a narrative therapy approach was helpful in assisting them to come to terms with the difficulties they experienced in their everyday lives once their role as activists came to an end. It shows how their different coping styles led to conflict and an almost complete breakdown in communication between them, and how their different levels of preparedness for change either facilitated or hindered their ability to cope with these changes. It looks at how offering them a neutral, safe and supportive therapeutic space helped them change their narratives about themselves and each other.

This study reviews literature concerning the nature and end of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. It looks at the social identity of struggle activists and what led to their political involvement. It reviews the issue of role loss and the challenge of adjustment. The transition cycle as set out by Nicolson (1990), is used to explain the transition process. Literature on inter-racial partnerships is included due to the multi-racial identity of the couple concerned. The principles of narrative therapy are explained and some thoughts on multi-cultural counseling and therapeutic alliance formation are included. This qualitative study uses the single case study method of data collection. Data was collected during a short-term couple therapy intervention that formed part of the researcher's training at the Child Guidance Clinic at the University of Cape Town.

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## Chapter One

### **Introduction**

"My friends, we are marching to victory. We are marching to the victory of freedom over the oppression of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of justice over the injustice of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of light over the darkness of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of life over the death of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of truth over the lie, the corruption, the deceit of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of goodness over the evil of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of gentleness, of kindness, over the harshness of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of goodness, of compassion, over the cruelty of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of compassion and sharing over the competitiveness, the selfishness of apartheid. We are marching to victory, the victory of peace and reconciliation over the violence and alienation of apartheid" (Asmal et al, 1996, p. 28).

These are the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his address to the congregation at the funeral of anti-apartheid struggle activist Chris Hani in April 1993, exactly one year before the first democratic election in South Africa was won by the African National Congress. This was a dream come true for struggle activists, the hope of a brighter future with liberty and equality for all.

In 1995, Daria Caliguire, a researcher at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, wrote:

"The April 1994 elections marked the beginning of a period of dramatic change in South Africa – a long-awaited shift from the authoritarianism of the old apartheid regime to the new, inclusive democracy of the government of national unity. But the transition to democracy has brought with it a degree of uncertainty as political space has been opened up for individuals and communities to renegotiate and redefine their own place as well as their relations to one another in the new democratic map of this country" (Caliguire, 1995, p. 9).

After the Anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa ended in 1994, most people were happy that at last the reign of Apartheid's terror was over. They hoped that life would improve for the vast majority of South Africans who had been disadvantaged by the injustices of the past. They breathed a collective sigh of relief to know that 40 years of struggle against an illegitimate

political system had finally come to an end and they trusted that there would be a place for all in the New South Africa.

It is my experience, as an activist myself, that many struggle activists of all creeds, colours and walks of life, having fought the battle at the frontline, were suddenly left without a war to fight, without a cause they were prepared to die for. All their energies of the past few intense struggle years were suddenly left without a route to be channeled into. Some found themselves not knowing what to do with their time and energy. Some teachers found themselves not being able to teach in a "normal" environment. Some workers found it hard to adjust to a regular programme, to work without the buzz around organizing strikes and stay-aways. Most missed the togetherness of the cause, the strength in numbers, the power of the oppressed. Suddenly the government was legitimate and there was seemingly nothing one was allowed to grumble about.

Groups of activists drifted apart. Some got high-ranking positions in the new dispensation. Others threw themselves into making sure the new government would do what it had promised. Still others gave up the fight and focused on their personal development, so long neglected during the period of group striving and individual sacrifice. Bronkhorst states: "During the transformation phase, the situation is marked by efforts towards rehabilitation and reconciliation. Armed opposition groups are quickly or gradually integrated or transformed into political parties; some former freedom fighters and dissidents become government officials" (1995, pp. 31-32).

It is my experience that some activists did not find another way of being. They seemed stuck forever in the glory of the past, finding it hard to adjust to the changes that occurred after the war for dignity ended. Some fell into depression, disillusioned that nobody had the presence of mind to realize that it was through their very efforts that the country is where it is today - a free land with legislation proclaiming equality for all. Many are now unemployed or struggling to fit into employment that does not involve a fight for freedom. The majority of their stories have not been told and their difficulties are often undocumented. Some have been unable to ask for help and their relationships have suffered as a result.

This dissertation is intended as a contribution to the exploration of how narrative therapy is able to help clients who experience difficulties adjusting to the changes that occurred when the struggle for freedom in South Africa ended in 1994. It specifically looks at the question of how the therapeutic space offered to a couple, both former struggle activists, gave them an opportunity to start the process of adjusting to the changes affecting their relationship in post-struggle South Africa.

## Chapter Two

### **Literature Review**

This chapter outlines literature relating to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and its end; the people who participated in the struggle for freedom; as well as how role loss may affect their relationships and ability to adjust to change. Finally it describes current thoughts on narrative therapy as a means of helping with the adjustment to change by offering people alternative stories about their lives. The chapter ends with a section on the therapeutic alliance in couple therapy.

#### **2. 1. The Anti-Apartheid Struggle**

"Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in a condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living" (Blumer, 1969, p. 8).

The anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa was based on dissatisfaction with legislated segregation of race groups and discrimination against the majority of South Africans, based on colour. According to Bekker:

"it involved conflict revolving around attempts at the political incorporation into South African society of the excluded majority of the population, namely those classified by the government of the time as Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans. The story of conflict... during the 1980s – is probably the best-known for it was during this decade that apartheid became an international issue, that the white and Afrikaner-dominated South African state, its security forces, and its policy of total strategy were pitted against the black exile movements, their international allies, and – at least in diplomatic terms – against governments of most countries in the rest of the world, all subscribing to the universal values of equity and non-racialism" (1996, p. 78).

The liberation struggle in South Africa was an armed struggle on many fronts. Exiles to many different countries fought a bush war. The military wing of the African National Congress, Umkhonto we Sizwe, known as MK, consisted in the main of militant youth from the townships



who had gone abroad for military training as they realized that stones would not bring down the regime (Myers, 1997).

But the struggle did not only involve those mentioned above. It also involved the ordinary person in the street. It became an unavoidable part of the life of every non-white person and community in South Africa. High school pupils, college and university students, and workers of all descriptions became part of the fight for freedom. New trade unions mushroomed up around the country, people marched in the streets, children boycotted their lessons – the struggle had begun in earnest! Some were more involved than others, but all were affected in some way.

On the positive side, it gave people a sense of purpose and belonging. It was exciting to be part of a bigger cause, to be fighting for the rights that had eluded an entire generation of South Africans. But the price to be paid was not a small one. Placards and stones came up against guns and bullets, and inevitably many lives were lost.

## **2. 2. The End of the Struggle**

The beginning of the end of the struggle started in 1986 with meetings between the ANC and various other South African organizations such as the Inyandza National Movement, Congress of South African Trade Unions, South African Congress of Trade Unions, National Union of South African Students, South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, National African Federation Chambers of Commerce, to name but a few.

In 1987 the Arusha declaration was adopted at the conference of the "Peoples of the World against Apartheid for a Democratic South Africa". It reaffirmed among other things that Apartheid was a crime against humanity that had persisted for too long, and had to go. In 1988 the New York Agreement was signed between Angola, Cuba, South Africa and the United States for a peaceful solution in South Western Africa.

A year later in 1989 Nelson Mandela met with the then State President P.W.Botha. The following year Nelson Mandela was released from prison and negotiations started between F.W de Klerk's apartheid government and the ANC. This resulted in the suspension of the armed struggle in February 1991. Negotiations between the apartheid South African government and the ANC peaked with the first democratic election in April 1994 when the ANC was voted into power and the struggle officially ended (Fung, 2002).

### **2. 3. The Struggle Activist: Social Identity and Political Involvement**

The kind of person who becomes a struggle activist is a question that can be addressed by looking at social identity and the need for political involvement. Breakwell emphasizes that there is a growing emphasis on the analysis of identity in its social context. "It is difficult to see how personal identity can be defined except in terms of its social history and context." (1983, p. 9).

Personal identity is the way persons categorize themselves in terms of personal or idiosyncratic attributes, i.e. how they see themselves as unique individuals who are different from other in-group members. Social identity is the way persons categorize themselves in terms of social category memberships, the "us" vs. "them", the "in-group" vs. "out-group".

On the face of it, identity may seem simple and obvious - we are who we are. However, it is in fact complex and contested. Each person has an individual, inward identity - a theme, style, manner, character, way of acting and being - that is fundamental. But each person also plays many different roles. Throughout one's life, one may live many variations of that theme, one may show different faces to others. Usually, each face or variation is consistent with the underlying theme, but there are occasions when this is not the case. Perhaps the variations occur because of changing circumstances. It is an attractive notion because of the way it attributes uniqueness and power to individuals. However, this notion tends to underestimate the influence of society and culture as sources of identity (Breakwell, 1983).

The distinction between social identity and personal identity is explored in self-categorization theory. Research shows that "social identity is sometimes able to function to the relative exclusion of personal identity" (Turner, 1984, p. 527). The adaptive function of social identity is to generate group behaviour. It is the mechanism that changes interpersonal behaviour (behaviour between individuals) into intergroup behaviour (behaviour between different groups of individuals). Self-categorization is the process whereby people identify themselves as individuals or as part of social groups and categories to varying degrees. "Self-categorization is seen as a dynamic, context dependent process, determined by comparative relations within a given context" (Turner, 1999, p. 13).

According to Turner, Tajfel's social identity theory started as an attempt to understand intergroup discrimination, as it was found that the very fact that people were categorized into a certain group caused them to favour their own group over another. This caused an in-group/out-group situation to exist.

"There was, in effect, a need for positive social identity, expressed through the desire to create, maintain, or enhance the positively valued distinctiveness of in-groups compared to outgroups on relevant dimensions, and aroused under conditions where people defined and evaluated themselves in terms of their group memberships" (1999, p. 8).

The individual who became a struggle activist found him/herself in an in-group with a strong political role distinction in society. According to Tajfel (1978) what an individual gets out of a group is a place in society and a positive identity, which can only be assured if his group is evaluated as superior to other groups. This competition between groups may lead to conflict.

The conflict theory of social change takes into account the role of conflict in generating social change. According to Schneiderman (1988) Marx's theory of class conflict emphasizes internal contradictions and their resolution as the basis for historical changes in economic and social structure. Du Preez (1982) states "politically active members of groups often promote group distinctiveness in order to gain power" (p. 23). Competition arises naturally between various groups even if they do not have to compete for the same resources, but competition turns to conflict when resources are limited or one group is thought to be dominating another. This is what spurred on the revolt against the apartheid regime.

There can be no doubt that there were a substantial number of activists who believed primarily in the cause for liberation, who joined the struggle because they believed in the fight for freedom based on their particular group being disadvantaged by the apartheid ideology. But many of those who engineered the struggle were in exile or in prison. So it was the scholars, students, and workers who were the fighters of the struggle at grassroots level. Whatever their motivation for joining the struggle, the role of the activist was a very particular one that had to change once the struggle ended.

Oatley (1991) describes a *role* as a "dynamic conception, a pattern that articulates one person's actions with those of others"(p. 70). He goes on to say that the social scientific concept of a role implies that one gains a sense of who one is from "immediate role-based structures of interaction" (p. 71) and that roles are the basic source of one's sense of self.

Many different agents contribute to an individual eventually taking on the role of a political activist. Smith-Dawson (1980) explores the question of how political learning takes place. She states that various social agents participate in the process of political socialization:

" [T]he family, schools, peer groups, and media all transmit messages concerning political facts, values, and attitudes. The individual, in turn, is not a mere sponge but a

cognitive being who sorts all the stimuli and evaluates, rejects, or accepts them... individual personality attributes, levels of political interest, predispositions to act, and other factors also enter into the political development process." (1980, pp. 92-93).

Studies conducted in the United States in the mid sixties describe political activists as mostly Black, of slightly higher socioeconomic status than non-activists, somewhat more confident than non-activists about their capabilities, but more distrustful of political authorities than non-participants. It was also found that feelings of political inefficacy, social isolation, and the feeling that one was being treated unfairly because of one's race were all positively linked to a willingness to participate in political activism (Hunt & Goel, 1980).

It is not entirely clear whether these characteristics hold for the Anti-Apartheid struggle activist. Many of those who fought for freedom were youths who were recruited from the townships. Others were learners who joined the struggle as part of wanting to be in on the action. Often they did not know exactly what the cause was all about, but the excitement of getting out of lessons, asserting their mass authority at schools, and setting up barricades in the streets was enough to lure them into active participation. The fact that many came from homes where their parents strongly opposed their participation in the struggle made it seem even more attractive to them as an extension of their teenage rebellion phase.

#### **2. 4. Role Loss and the Challenge of Adjustment**

Oatley (1991) states that habits and roles help us to be effective by allowing us to control a limited part of our world and to maintain a sense of self in relation to others. If these habits and familiar roles are withheld from us, or we have to suddenly take on new and unexpected roles, we become disorientated in the space between the old, familiar roles and the not-yet-learned new ones. This gives us the feeling that the world is a strange and scary place. It can lead to such a feeling of threat to one's sense of self that it results in a clinical depression. Oatley states that research has shown that "clinical depression is most often caused not biologically but socially, and is the result of loss of a valued role, when alternatives to it are difficult or impossible to construct" (p. 79).

Researchers studying the connection between social support and stress suggest that long periods of isolation lead to anxiety while affiliation to a group reduces anxiety. Schachter was one of the first researchers to examine what became known as affiliation theory. Through various experiments, he discovered that one reason people seek affiliations to groups is that it allows

them to compare their behaviour, feelings and opinions socially with those of others in order to gauge the accuracy and strength of their opinions and reactions (Baron et al, 1992).

Role transitions inevitably cause anxiety at some level that may lead to depression and reduced functioning, more so when there is a lack of social support or an absence of clearly defined new roles.

## **2. 5. Nicolson's Transition Cycle**

Nicolson (1990) outlines his theoretical framework of role transitions. The theory concerns itself mainly with the needs and motives of people entering job transitions and explores how their new roles differ characteristically from their previous ones. However it may be generalized to include transitions of various kinds, such as the role transitions encountered by struggle activists when the struggle ended.

The transition cycle consists of four phases namely the (1) **preparation stage** (the period leading up to the point of change); (2) **encounter stage** (the first days and weeks of familiarization with a new situation); (3) **adjustment stage** (the period of developing performance and psychological change); and (4) **stabilization stage** (the steady state achieved after adjustment). Each stage has its own tasks and goals, pitfalls and problems, and strategies and remedies. These are outlined by Nicolson as follows:

### **2. 5. 1. Tasks and Goals of the Transition Cycle**

In the **preparation stage** these include developing helpful expectations, motives, and feelings. In the **encounter stage** one needs confidence in coping, and enjoyment in making sense of the situation. In the **adjustment stage** the tasks involve personal change, role development, and relationship building. In the **stabilization stage** sustained trust, commitment, and effectiveness with tasks and people are important issues (p. 89).

### **2. 5. 2. Pitfalls and problems in the Transition Cycle**

These include fearfulness of the impending situation, reluctance to change, and being unprepared for the transition, in the **preparation stage**. There is also shock at being placed in an unfamiliar situation, rejection of or by the new system, and regret about the situation left behind, in the **encounter stage**. Not fitting in or not being suited to the new role, feeling degraded or degrading the new situation, and grieving for the old affects the **adjustment stage** and experiencing failure, having a sense of fatalism, and faking one's feelings cause difficulty in the **stabilization stage** (p. 90).

### 2. 5. 3. Strategies and Remedies for the Transition Cycle

Corrective strategies in the different stages of the transition cycle involve a realistic preview of the situation, making advance contacts, and accurate self-appraisal in the ***preparation stage***. In the ***encounter stage*** social supports, flexibility in the system, safety, and the freedom to explore and discover are important aspects. In the ***adjustment stage*** it helps to have real work to do, to experience early success, and to have useful failure through fast feedback and mutual control of the situation. The ***stabilization stage*** requires the strategies of goal setting and appraisal for role evolution and discretion management (p. 92).

It should be noted that while this offers a basic model of a transition cycle, no two transition cycles are ever the same and each is driven by its specific context.

“It aims to be a systematic general framework, allowing for the full range of extremely different experiences people encounter in transition to be interpolated and interpreted. It does so with the aid of three guiding principles: recursion, disjunction and interdependence” (Nicolson, 1990, pg. 87). These are outlined below.

### 2. 5. 4. The Three Guiding Principles of the Transition Cycle

#### (i) Recursion

Nicolson (1990) states that each one of us is at some point on one or more transition cycles. Movement of these is continuous as even the most stable conditions can possibly change in the future. They therefore embody varying states of readiness for the onset of a new cycle. Each transition experience in some way affects one’s experience of future transitions (p. 87).

#### (ii) Disjunction

According to Nicolson (1990), experiences and events are divided into different stages according to their distinctive qualities. Different psychological processes can be seen to dominate each stage. Expectations and motives are primary in the ***preparation stage***; emotions and perceptions rule in the ***encounter stage***; assimilation and accommodation hold sway in the ***adjustment stage***; and relating and performing govern the ***stabilization stage***. These stages work together to form a cycle (p. 87).

### (iii) Interdependence

Nicholson (1990) states that what happens at one stage has a powerful influence on what happens in the next. For example, a person's readiness to change (preparation) can ease or sharpen the immediate impact of the encounter and depending on what the encounter is like, this can in turn determine how the person will adjust to the situation (p. 88).

## **2. 6. The Inter-Racial Partnership**

" When individuals look into a romantic partner's eyes, what image of themselves do they see? Does the image that reflects back affirm their hopes and inspirations for themselves and their relationships? Or does it confirm their own self-doubts or uncertainties?"

(Murry, 2000, p. 173).

This question is particularly relevant in a country such as South Africa where racial segregation was the norm until the very recent past. During this time people were judged to be more or less valuable or worthy based on the racial group to which they belonged. Often people from the oppressed group took on the value-judgement placed upon them by the oppressor and projected this prejudice onto all people from the opposing racial group.

Given the racist history of South Africa, it is almost inevitable that alliances across racial boundaries lead from time to time to tensions within the relationship. Brislin states:

"Part of every individual's socialization involves relations between members of various groups within a given country. Individuals are taught that certain people should be avoided on the basis of their colour, religion, social status, ethnic heritage, occupation, parentage, or perceived state of mental health. Indeed, such a division of people into one's own in-group and a set of out-groups has been posited as a universal among humans" (1987, p. 7).

In a country such as South Africa where legislation determined in-groups and out-groups, people had limited choices regarding who their in-groups and out-groups would be. There was little choice around choosing a romantic partner, as people of different race groups were not allowed to have contact with each other. People who dared to cross the colour line in search of romance were charged with immorality and could be jailed for their audacity. Many people crossed South Africa's borders in order to get married or at least live in peace. Many stayed and conducted clandestine relationships, sometimes as trophies in the face of security forces during the struggle years.

People of all creeds and colours were brought together by the common cause of the struggle. People from different backgrounds suddenly found themselves attracted to the difference of the legislated "other". Often they had nothing else in common besides the common cause for freedom, but during those years it almost did not matter. The urgency of the cause surpassed everything else.

What happened to these partnerships once the struggle ended? In my experience people found it difficult to realize that the force that bound them together had dissipated. Often the cultural differences became more obvious as life normalized. Without a cause to fight, the person representing difference closest to the activist often became the target for the outpouring of misdirected anger.

Being with a partner who doesn't share one's cultural identity, especially in a racially charged environment, can lead to problems. Pajackowska and Young write,

"A sense of being located historically and socially is fundamental to a sense of belonging and participating in the creative process of a particular culture. If cultural belongingness resides in those discourses which call upon collective memory, then the lack of access to the elements of that memory, along with a sense of dislocation comes a feeling of loss of cultural cohesion" (1992, p. 210).

Effective communication allows discourses to be shared with partners, which may improve their sense of cultural belongingness.

People develop their identities by communicating and interacting with other people and the relationship is in turn developed by the ongoing communication and interaction between individuals. Relationships have a definitive effect on an individual's identity. The resulting relationship is a composite of the identities of the individuals involved and the communication process is a way of defining the relationship as well as the participants in that relationship (Wood, 1982).

"To carve an identity within a particular relationship is to become a substantially different self than the one existing prior to the relationship. As a relationship becomes more intimate and a partner more significant, an individual's self-definition increasingly takes into account the understanding of the evolving relational culture... (i.e.) a privately transacted system of understandings" (Wood, 1982, p. 77). This mediates actions and meanings of the partners in a relationship and forms a sort of relational microculture.



Cupach and Imahori (1993) in discussing cultural identity and relationships, outline various aspects of identity along three dimensions that are interdependent. These are scope, salience, and intensity. They quote Collier (1989):

" [I]t can be argued that the various aspects of identity vary along three interdependent dimensions: scope, salience, and intensity. Scope refers to the number of persons who potentially share an identity. Thus relational identity is always smaller in scope than cultural identity. Salience refers to the relative importance of a particular aspect of identity (e.g., cultural identity) in a specific situation, relative to the other aspects of one's total identity. Intensity refers to the strength with which an aspect of identity is communicated'. (Collier, p. 296). Variations in the scope, salience, and intensity of aspects of one's identity are influenced by the contextual parameters of interaction, including the nature of the relationship between interactants" (1993, p. 112).

When a relationship between two people becomes intense to the point of enmeshment, their relational identities may override their separate cultural identities. Despite this, an individual can never entirely lose his/her cultural identity and it comes to the fore in different situations such as when a mixed-race couple visits their families of origin or when conflict arises in the relationship and cultural differences become apparent.

Tracy (1990) discusses the concept of *face*, which refers to the identities people ascribe to others or claim for themselves in social situations. There are two different kinds of face viz. negative and positive face. Negative face refers to a person's need to be independent and free from being imposed upon by others. It is called "negative face" because it does not require the active participation of others. Positive face refers to the individuals need to be regarded positively by others and is called "positive face" because it depends of the input of others. One could threaten someone's face by insulting him or her for example. Face threats are counterbalanced by facework, which involves communication that acknowledges the identity of the other as well as the self in interaction. In facework a tension exists between satisfying one's own face and that of one's relational partner. For example, if one acknowledges the other's face need for an apology, one has to do so at the cost of one's own face. The issue of face is something that can become extremely problematic in an intercultural relationship where the possibility of misinterpretation and misunderstanding is rife. "Face" varies cross-culturally because threats to a person's face are defined and handled differently from one culture to another.

According to Falicov (1986), couples can minimize or maximize any similarity or difference at different times for different purposes. In the case of an interracial relationship where the partners are romantically and therefore emotionally involved this difference can be a real source of disharmony and can exacerbate the usual pressures of a partnership leading to conflict. Conflict seems to highlight people's awareness of the other's differences and these differences in turn may serve as the basis for further conflict. In a situation where there is a ready made difference, such as a racial difference, people tend to blame that difference for the difficulties experienced in a relationship. This forms a ready-made excuse for the conflict.

When one considers the above issues related to interracial partnerships, it becomes apparent that the challenge of negotiating an interracial romantic partnership in the aftermath of apartheid is indeed a huge one. This is especially so when individuals within that relationship have been so preoccupied with a greater, common cause that they have failed to notice or acknowledge the differences between themselves as people, let alone as members of opposing cultural groups within the struggle.

This "ready-made excuse" referred to above is known in narrative therapy as a "thin description" of a problem. According to Morgan (2000): "Thin description allows little space for the complexities and contradictions of life...(or) for people to articulate their own particular meanings of their actions and the context in which they occurred"(p. 12). She goes on to explain that these thin descriptions of people's actions or identities are often defined by others who hold the power to define a situation, e.g. teachers defining the actions/identities of their pupils without understanding the true cause of the problem. The problem worsens when individuals start to define themselves according to these "thin descriptions".

## **2. 7. Narrative Therapy**

According to Morgan (2000), narrative therapy is based on the idea that we live our lives according to stories we tell ourselves and those others tell about us. These stories are told in order to make sense of ourselves and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Many of our dominant stories have their roots in our childhood contexts and are co-authored by those around us. These dominant stories constantly influence the way we see the world and ourselves, and are often at the root of our problems. The narrative approach is based on a social constructionist perspective, which states that identities are not the sole property of the person to whom they are attached but are constructed out of the cultural context surrounding the person. The narrative approach to therapy aims to locate the problem in the cultural context in which the person's story is embedded instead of in the person himself or herself and therefore strives to see the problem

as the problem and not the person as the problem. In so doing it serves to externalize the problem.

The basic assumptions underlying this approach have been outlined by Michael White and David Epston in their work on narrative therapy. They have drawn heavily on the work of various scholars from a number of disciplines, including Edward Bruner (ethnographer), Michael Foucault (French historian & philosopher), Jerome Bruner (psychologist), and Gregory Bates (systems theorist).

According to White and Epston (1990), Edward Bruner argued that the stories people tell do not merely describe their realities but actually shape their realities. Another assumption is that stories are not invented by a single person but are produced by the "cultural soup" in which we swim. Various discourses lie embedded in stories that affect the way people live their lives.

They quote Foucault as speaking about the "gaze". This refers to social surveillance and scrutiny that makes us aware of ourselves as we appear to others. Some people do not live their lives according to dominant stories but choose to align themselves with contradictory or alternative discourses, thereby choosing alternative cultural patterns. Dominant cultural discourses are often severely restrictive and limiting to a person's knowledge and motivation of how to think or act and can cause alternative or preferable ways of living to remain unexplored. Taking apart (deconstructing) dominant discourses can lead to new ways of being and living. According to them, Bruner says that there are always lived experiences that are not encapsulated in stories. Lastly they write that Bateson suggests that we learn by comparing one phenomenon with another. Therefore the work of the narrative therapist is to assist the client to construct a more appealing and satisfying storyline (White & Epston, 1990).

Narrative therapy is characterized by establishing a strong relationship with the client, which is based on trust. It has in common with other approaches the fact that listening skills are important. This listening is based on gathering information about the client's areas of competence and ability to be used later when the preferred story is constructed in place of the "problem saturated" story. The narrative therapist takes the position of being respectfully curious and uses this to explore the effect of the problem on the client and the action the client is taking to reduce the impact of the problem. The narrative therapist engages in externalizing conversations that aim to separate the person from the problem, thus opening up a space where shame and blame become less significant. The client is invited to judge for him/herself whether to continue living in the problem saturated story or to shift into the alternative, preferred story.

One of the most important tasks is to prepare the client ahead of time for when the problem attempts to come back (Winslade & Monk, 1998).

The narrative therapist needs to maintain an attitude of optimism that the client already possesses the ability to resolve or manage the problem. She needs to be respectful of the fact that the client is someone who has knowledge and must maintain a tentative stance rather than one of authority and knowing. The therapist should use curiosity and a position of deliberate ignorance in order to explore the world of the client instead of assuming to know what the client is about without exploration. The therapist enters into a co-authorship with the client through negotiation and power-sharing in creating the preferred story (Winslade & Monk, 1998).

According to Erik Sween (1999), many forms of psychology and therapy place enormous emphasis on the process of individuation. In this way, the individual is believed to construct his or her internal world almost single-handedly. Narrative therapy provides a contrast to this perspective. Narrative therapy proposes that identity is co-created in relationship with other people as well as one's history and culture. Thus, being seen by others in a certain way can contribute as much as seeing oneself in a certain way. We come to see ourselves by looking in the mirrors that other people hold up for us. In this way, a person's identity is socially constructed by the stories we are told about ourselves by others and the stories we tell ourselves based on how we think others perceive us. Narrative therapy focuses on the degree to which those stories affect our lives.

## **2. 8. The Therapeutic Alliance in Couple Therapy**

Couples engaged in conflict often coerce therapists into various unwanted roles such as judge, expert, or adjudicator. According to Rait (2000), it is a central requirement for couple therapy that a therapeutic alliance be formed between the couple and the therapist. This is different from the alliances formed in individual therapy, as it requires the formation of multiple alliances and the adoption of conceptual frameworks involving triangles. This can often be difficult work as most times at least one partner may be a reluctant participant in the therapy and therefore there are often varying levels of commitment involved.

Rait (2000) suggests that the therapist has to establish a working relationship with each partner and that this relationship building is a very important yet idiosyncratic facet of the therapist's skill. He gives the following example:

“(T)he couple therapist may affiliate with one family member while simultaneously addressing other members, sometimes by using relational language that links their

complementary behaviour (e.g. 'Your wife seems so sad. Can you speak to her in a way that does not depress her?'). Other times, the therapist may choose to challenge the couple or family's pattern of interaction while simultaneously supporting each member as individuals (e.g., 'For two such intelligent and articulate people, you certainly constructed a very inefficient relationship!')" (Rait 2000, p. 213).

Whitaker (1981) suggests that a good substitute for theory is the accumulated and organized residue of experience plus the freedom to allow the (therapeutic) relationship to happen. To be who we are as therapists with the minimum of anticipatory set and maximum responsiveness to authenticity and to our own growth impulses.

## **2. 9. Multicultural Therapy**

Conducting couple therapy with a multicultural couple presents significant challenges with regard to the therapist's ability to understand the perspective of both partners in an unbiased manner. Sue and Sue (1990), suggest that the skilled multicultural counselor should have specific knowledge of the racial groups her clients are from and must be aware of her own biases and values, and how these may affect her ability to work with culturally different clients. My racial identity is very similar to the male partner of the couple discussed in this dissertation, as I am coloured and was an activist in the struggle. However, I did not find myself biased towards either partner. This was possible because I deliberately looked past their colour and saw them as individuals, and because I liked them each as people. Supervision from the team behind the one-way mirror confirmed that I was not being partial to either one.

## **2. 10. Link to the Clinical Case**

The clinical case described in this dissertation hinges on a broad understanding of the different aspects discussed in this chapter. It will briefly highlight a couple's involvement in the struggle; their social identities and political involvement as struggle activists; their individual ways of adjusting (or not adjusting) to the role losses that resulted from the struggle ending; and the challenges they face as a couple in post apartheid South Africa. More specifically it will document how therapy, and the therapeutic alliance formed with the therapist, led to the changing narratives that assisted them to find new ways of thinking about the challenges they continue to face.

## Chapter Three

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study and looks at the methodological principles inherent in this type of research. It also briefly outlines the theoretical perspective on which the research is based and elucidates the manner in which the data was collected and interpreted.

"Is this work better defined as a world-view? Perhaps, but even this is not enough. Perhaps it's an epistemology, a philosophy, a personal commitment, a politics, an ethics, a practice, a life, and so on" (White, 1995, p. 37). These are the words of Michael White, who along with David Epston, pioneered ways of working that have come to be known as narrative therapy, in describing the possibilities of what narrative therapy may be. Narrative therapy is based on a social constructionist perspective that flows from constructionism.

#### **3. 1 The Constructionist Viewpoint**

"(Three umpires) are sitting around over a beer, and one says, 'There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way they are.' Another says, 'There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way I see 'em.' The third says 'There's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't nothin' until I call 'em.' " (Anderson, 1990, p. 75).

The third view illustrates the constructionist viewpoint, which rejects the idea, that *meaningful* reality exists outside of the working of consciousness and proposes that "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). It holds that meaning is constructed and not discovered, as an objectivist viewpoint would suggest. According to Crotty (1998) "it is clear (from a constructionist perspective) that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon...in this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning" (p. 9).

#### **3. 2. The Social Constructionist Perspective**

This study is based on a social constructionist perspective, which suggests that all meaning is constructed according to a social or cultural framework upon which we base our personal meanings. According to Freedman and Combs (1996) the most important feature of the social constructionist worldview that informs narrative therapy is a specific attitude about reality that is summed up by Parè (1995) who says that from this perspective realities we live are those we

negotiate with each other, so that knowledge is created within a “community of knowers” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 20).

### **3. 3. The Postmodern Worldview**

The theoretical perspective of this study is essentially therefore postmodernist in nature. The postmodern worldview is based on the idea that realities are (a) socially constructed (b) constituted through language (c) organized and maintained through narrative, and (d) that there are no essential truths (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In using this theoretical perspective the researcher aims to see the world from the perspective of the clients and to construct meanings in collaboration with them. This, “*seeing the world from the client’s perspective*” is one of the defining characteristics of qualitative research methodology.

### **3. 4. The Case Study as Qualitative Research Method**

This study employs the case study method of qualitative research. Researchers have long battled with different issues surrounding the validity and reliability of qualitative research in general and case studies in particular. “Case study” is a term used to describe a particular method of social inquiry. It differs from other social research methods such as social experiments or social surveys. This difference is based on the fact that case study methodology focuses on detailed information collected about a single case, as opposed to surveys that generate limited information about many cases. It also involves the study of social situations that occur naturally as opposed to the experimental situations engineered by researchers using social experiments (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000).

According to Huff (2002), “case study” refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalizable truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.

Case study research, as a form of qualitative research, comes with its own unique set of issues and criticisms, the main one being the issue of generalization. Stake (2000) writes: “A case is often thought of as a constituent member of a target population. And since single members poorly represent whole populations, one case study is seen as a poor basis for generalization”

(p. 23). He challenges this view by explaining that there is often a need generalize to the case in question or to another case rather than to a target population. "As readers recognize essential similarities to cases of interest to them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalization" (Stake, 2000, p. 23).

Generalization is the aim of research based on an objectivist worldview. This would usually occur in the field of science where the main focus would be around prediction and control. Lincoln and Guba quote Kaplan: " '[T]he generalization must be truly universal, *unrestricted as to time and space*. It must formulate what is always and everywhere the case, provided only that appropriate conditions are satisfied' (Kaplan, 1964, p. 91; emphasis added)" (2000, p. 27).

They go on to discuss Cronbach's view that human action is too complex and changeable for this type of strict rule to be applied to it, and introduce Robert Stake's concept of "naturalistic generalization" which involves the idea that "[C]ase studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 36). Case studies may not fit in with the positivistic view of generalization but have much to contribute to the understanding of unique, personal experiences occurring in uncontrived social situations.

This dissertation uses the qualitative case study method to structure the data obtained from a clinical study in which a series of couple therapy sessions are used to illustrate the difficulty of individuals adjusting to change in post-struggle South Africa and the effect this has on their relationship. The case material shows how the couple drifted apart following the changes that occurred after the struggle ended, how their adjustment styles differed, how each used the therapeutic situation to express previously unexpressed differences in ideology and expectation, and how their problems were defined in their individual and joint narratives.

The data collected in this case study is not intended to be generalizable, but rather to offer the reader an opportunity to examine the particular and unique, and in so doing, based on his/her own experiences, develop the 'naturalistic generalization' Stake writes about, if and where appropriate.

In discussing the writing up of qualitative research, Wolcott (1990) writes:

"Because the researcher's role is ordinarily such an integral part of qualitative study, I write descriptive accounts in the first person, and I urge that others do (or, in some cases, be allowed to do) the same. I recognize that there are still academic editors on



the loose who insist that research be reported in the third person...I think the practice reveals a belief that impersonal language presupposes objective truth... but I have yet to be convinced that our highest calling is to serve science" (p. 19).

The research in this dissertation has been written with this view in mind.

### **3. 5. The Couple Therapy**

The therapy was done at the Child Guidance Clinic, which forms part of the psychology department at the University of Cape Town. The clinic is essentially a training facility for students doing a Masters degree in clinical psychology, and provides a psychological service to the larger Cape Town community. Services include, among others, assessment and therapeutic intervention for children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as interventions with the families and parental couples connected to these children.

In obtaining the data, each session of the therapy was video recorded with session notes serving to further document the process. All sessions were conducted with the couple and therapist being observed by a professional team from behind a one-way mirror. Supervision consisted of group discussion sessions following directly after the therapy sessions. Counter-transference responses were duly noted and discussed in order to facilitate therapeutic understanding. Homework was given in the form of tasks they needed to work on such as only discussing their difficulties at specified times during the day or week. Due to this being couple therapy, sessions were not scheduled weekly in order to give the clients the opportunity to do therapeutic work between sessions. Often there were spaces of two or more weeks between sessions either because the clients were unable to attend or because time was required for them to do homework.

### **3. 6. Ethical Issues**

In order to ensure anonymity, the couple will be referred to by pseudonyms and demographic details of their history will be omitted.

At the start of the therapy, the clients were informed of the Clinic's teaching status and that the material might be used for purposes of furthering knowledge of the issues emerging from the case. They were also informed that sessions would be recorded and that a team would be observing at all times. They were invited to meet the team behind the mirror. The female partner accepted this offer while the male did not. The male partner was very enthusiastic about the case material being used to further academic knowledge. Both were happy with the conditions and accepted it.

**3.7. How Data was Collected and Analyzed**

Data was distilled from the case notes and video recordings of the sessions to make the couple's changing joint and individual narratives explicit. The description and interpretation of these narratives form the method of analysis used in this dissertation. Vignettes and extracts are used to highlight specific issues.

## Chapter Four

### **Referral Problem and Relevant Case History**

#### **4. 1. Referral Problem**

Shane aged 11 years and in Grade 5 at the time, was referred to the Child Guidance Clinic (CGC) at the suggestion of his school principal, as he was displaying angry, aggressive and unsociable behaviour in the classroom situation. His mother was the person who contacted the clinic for an appointment, as she was equally concerned about recent changes in the child's behaviour. As the policy at the CGC is that the whole family attend the initial session wherever possible, the Smiths were invited to come along as a family. The family consists of David Smith (father) aged 43 years, Nina Adams (mother) aged 38 years, Shane Smith (index patient) aged 11 years, and 5-year-old Tammy Smith.

David and Nina reported that for the seven months preceding the initial session they had seen changes in Shane's behaviour. He was sometimes very outspoken, argumentative, disobedient, and uncooperative, especially towards his father. He is an above-average learner academically but had been getting into trouble at school for being disruptive in the classroom. He often complained that other children were bullying him and he then reacted with aggression in defence. As a result of these occurrences, there was an increase in his demerits at school and he had recently been disqualified from an examination for talking to another boy while the examination was in progress. The parents reported that although Shane had always been a slightly outspoken child, they had never experienced such aggression and misbehaviour on his part before.

During the interview each family member was asked individually what he or she thought the problem was. Nina said she felt that Shane's difficulties were the result of domestic problems and relationship difficulties between her and David. She said that she had noticed a change in Shane's behaviour at home since she and David had moved into separate rooms after spousal conflict led to their estrangement. She explained that at the time of the interview, David had been sleeping in Shane's room for the past four months, while Tammy moved into her parent's room with Nina. The basis of the spousal conflict was described by Nina to be the fact that David had been unemployed for the past seven months and the tension between the couple had been escalating since that time. He had been unable to make a financial contribution towards household expenses leaving the burden of responsibility to rest on Nina. Their relationship was suffering under the strain of this and communication between the couple had essentially become

non-existent. This, in Nina's opinion, was having a negative effect on the children, especially Shane, who had become his mother's confidante and very opposed to his father in every way. Shortly before coming for the interview, Nina had sent David an eviction notice about which he was still very angry.

David felt that while all this was true, it was not the reason for Shane's problems. He thought the fact that they had raised Shane to be a free-thinker, who is articulate and outspoken, was the reason for the difficulties he was experiencing, as he was growing up and was coming into opposition with the ideologies of others who did not understand his way of being.

Shane was unwilling to offer an opinion as to what his difficulties were and it became apparent that he was aware of the tension between his parents. He also seemed aware of the effect his opinion may have on one or both of them so he chose to remain largely silent despite much encouragement to speak.

Tammy was able to say that she was upset by the fact that her father often went out and came back very late, this made her worry about him and made her mother very angry.

After discussion with the therapist's supervisor and professional team it became clear that the problem was one within the spousal relationship and that work with the couple was indicated as opposed to child or family work. This was explained to the family and the parents agreed to contract for 6 to 8 couple therapy sessions.

Problems as outlined by the couple in the second half of the session were as follows:

- They were not speaking to each other effectively, communication was down to speaking via the children or abrupt commands.
- They were not sleeping in the same bedroom and sexual intimacy was non-existent.
- David was not contributing to the household expenses or helping with chores around the house.
- David was often out for long periods of time leaving Nina to wonder where he was.
- He often became irritable or ignored her when she tried to speak to him.
- David said that Nina was always bossing him around and acting like a 'white madam'.
- He felt that the requests and demands she made on him were unreasonable as he was doing his best to find work but could not just take any job as he needed to preserve his creativity.
- He was also very upset by the fact that she had sent him an eviction notice.

They felt that the therapy would serve as a last attempt to fix their relationship. It was put to them that whatever the outcome, the therapy could offer them a space to work through their difficulties and decide on a way forward. Nina was particularly willing and motivated but David seemed rather doubtful and defensive at the start of the therapy.

## **4. 2. Relevant Case History**

### **4. 2. 1. Nina's history**

Nina was the younger of two siblings of immigrant parents who settled in South Africa before her birth. She described herself as coming from a traditional 'white' Portuguese family. Her parents were staunch Catholics and she was raised according to the rules of Christianity. Her family was very close, with the parents being very involved in their children's lives. The extended family was also very involved and had much input into the affairs of Nina's family. She was a happy and contented child who grew up in Cape Town and after finishing school, completed a child-care diploma, worked as a dental nurse, and qualified as a teacher, after which she entered a convent in order to be trained as a Roman Catholic nun. After joining the struggle she qualified as a nurse and at the time of the intervention was managing a crèche at a hospital.

Nina's older sister, who was a struggle activist in the anti-apartheid struggle, was in exile in Cuba during the struggle years and wrote regularly to Nina about the fight for liberation. Nina did not always receive the correspondence from her sister, as the convent authorities censored her mail. On one occasion she received a letter from her sister encouraging her to join the struggle. She was deeply moved by her sister's words and decided to leave the convent before taking her final vows. She joined up with her sister's activist friends who were still in South Africa and used her singing talent to sing at activist meetings. This is where she met David who was an activist, engineering the sound at such get-togethers. Nina was very involved in the struggle and kept in contact with her sister. Once the struggle ended her and sister returned from exile, their relationship continued to be close. Nina's relationship with her family was good and she had a strong support system. Her family liked David but felt he was not making an adequate contribution to the household and was causing Nina much stress.

### **4. 2. 2. David's history**

David was the youngest of six siblings from a coloured working class family who grew up in a semi-rural environment. Two of his siblings, who were much older than David, drowned when he was very young. David was too young to remember the incident clearly but knew that his

parents were very upset by the death of their children. His father was the local Moravian priest and his mother was a housewife. He grew up with strict Christian morals and values imposed upon him. His family was well respected in the community and this led him to feel that much was expected of him as the son of such a family. He joined the struggle while still at school and became a leader within the activist circle in his community. He was always involved in community issues and since an early age his identity was framed in this way. Everything else in his life seemed to fade into the distance as he took up his place as a leader in the struggle. He dropped out of Std. 9 when his struggle activities became more important than his schooling.

David reported that he got along well with his father as a child but that he was not able to live up to his father's expectations as he grew up. He did not fit into his family's image of how he should be. He always had a strong sense of community and justice, and he found an alternative identity in the struggle activities he pursued. He had wanted to be a journalist but instead he threw himself into the struggle with all the passion he could muster. He felt a sense of belonging, of oneness with the cause. The struggle became what he lived for. His interests extended to the arts, he loved painting, music, anything creative.

David did not have much contact with his family, who saw him as somewhat strange due to his Rasta lifestyle. According to the couple, his mother wanted him to "clean up his act", marry Nina, and live a respectable, mainstream lifestyle. He did not have contact with his siblings, as he felt alien to them.

By David's own admission he has had an unstable employment history, as he always needed to find a job that satisfied his creative urge. He tends to get into struggles with the management at his places of employment about rights and ways of doing things. He would not persevere at a job if he was unhappy and needed to find fulfillment or leave. His last stable job before the intervention was an "affirmative action position" in the printing industry, where he had been very happy until he was retrenched. He had been retrenched three times within a couple of years and was finding it hard to keep his morale high. He was not qualified for any particular type of job and found it difficult to find suitable employment. Shortly before the intervention commenced he had attempted to start his own business but this had been unsuccessful and was an area of great contention between him and Nina.

#### 4. 2. 3. History as a couple

It was through his interest in music that he connected with Nina at a struggle rally in 1988, where she was singing and he was engineering the sound. They met one evening and he never

returned home but immediately moved into the communal house she lived in and they have been together ever since as their involvement in the struggle was intense and they lived their lives for the common cause. It was their main interest and focus. Their personal differences faded into the background. They were activists held together by the dream that South Africa would one day be free.

After Shane was born they moved to various flats and at the time of the intervention were living in a two bed-roomed flat that Nina was very unhappy about. She felt that they needed more space and that if David contributed they could afford to live in a house where the children would have more space. She said she wanted a normal household with a husband who worked, enough money and happy children.

#### 4. 2. 4. Activities since the struggle ended.

Since the end of the anti-apartheid struggle, things had changed radically for the couple. They seemed to feel the loss of a common cause and identity. The power dynamic in the relationship had reportedly shifted as well. David used to be the leader of the household, as in the struggle but since the struggle ended, Nina had taken over much of the responsibility and leadership in the family. She had pursued other community interests and was very much involved in her union at work. She was the shop steward for her hospital and traveled around the country to attend conferences. David found a marginal identity with a group of Rastafarians and preferred to spend his free time pursuing activities that harnessed his creativity, like painting murals, doing odd jobs that he found stimulating and spending time with his Rasta friends. He was involved in various small-time projects usually for no monetary gain. He indicated that he missed the respect and sense of camaraderie he was used to during the struggle years.

The couple felt that they did not share each other's interests anymore and that the loss of the struggle cause had left them feeling alienated from their group of friends and each other. Nina thought that David had given up on life and said she missed the strong leader he was before. David's lack of enthusiasm and commitment angered Nina, who was solely responsible for maintaining the household at the time. She felt he was not making an adequate contribution and said she had had enough of his laid back, irresponsible attitude. He felt that she was being a "white madam" who was trying to fit him into her idea of how he should be. He resented being told what to do by her and she resented having to carry all the responsibility for the family on her own.

#### 4. 2. 5. Relationship at time of intake

According to both partners, they usually got along reasonably well despite all these issues, but at the time of the first interview, their relationship was extremely strained. They were under severe financial pressure due to David's unemployment and Nina was embarrassed that she had to keep taking loans from her family and friends. They owed large sums of money to various creditors who had been threatening legal action against Nina. Their relationship had deteriorated to the point that Nina had sent David an ultimatum in the form of a lawyer's letter stating that he should either contribute to the household expenses or move out. David felt that he was only able to do as much as he could, as he was finding it hard to find suitable employment because of his lack of qualifications. He felt that she was forcing him to do things he felt unable to do. They had not been speaking to each other for four months and were sleeping in separate bedrooms. He did not always tell her where he was going and would often stay out late. She complained that this situation upset the children and annoyed her enormously. She was also upset that he did not help with household chores and became defensive when she tried to speak to him about issues that bothered her.

David reported feeling insecure in the relationship, as he had no legal rights to anything they owned because they were not legally married and all their goods had been acquired in Nina's name. Nina said she had always wanted to marry him, especially in the light of her religious beliefs, but that David had been reluctant to commit himself to marriage. Nina had previously been Catholic but now attended various other churches with the children. She received much support from the church and found comfort in her religion. David is a Rastafarian who reportedly does not follow all the practices of the Rasta faith but who has limited contact with the Rastafarian community where he saw himself as being respected as a leader. They reported differing parental styles in that David was more laid-back but also more demanding of respect from Shane, whereas Tammy was able to do whatever she liked around him. Nina on the other hand had a soft spot for Shane, who she saw as her strength and confidante. Their favoured methods of discipline were: discussing the matter and deprivation of privileges.

Nina thought the conflict between them was having an adverse effect on their children, especially Shane. David said that Shane was losing respect for him as a result of them having shared a bedroom. The children were clearly aware of the conflict but were unwilling to discuss it.



## Chapter Five

### **Clinical Formulation**

The following factors were taken into account in order to understand the difficulties the couple presented with and their inability to cope in their relationship at the time of coming to therapy.

They met during the struggle and it seems that she was very impressed with him even though he did not seem to notice her at first. She was a young white woman who had recently left the convent and he was a slightly older coloured man with an alternative lifestyle that epitomized the struggle for her. He had been in prison briefly for political activity and she seemed to idealize him. At this stage he had a job but the struggle was his main focus.

She was unemployed and adjusting to life outside the protective environment of the convent where she had spent a few years before deciding not to take her final vows to become a nun. He was "laid back" and must have been a refreshing change from the rigid life she had lived in the convent. Joining the struggle was the reason for her decision to leave the convent and David seemed to be the fulfillment of the dream, the person who could, by affiliation, make her truly part of the struggle for freedom from oppression. So they got together under these idealistic circumstances. She, talented and singing at rallies and he in the background, involved and dedicated to the cause. The cause was what gave them their identities as individuals and as a couple, they lived for the cause, it was their main focus and it allowed them to look past their differences.

David's need to belong to the cause can be seen as a need for an identity and a role in the community. His father was a leader in the local community and somehow David did not live up to the conventional expectations of his father. He grew up with older siblings who did things according to their father's expectations. David was seen as the 'black sheep' of the family, as he was rebellious. He got involved with less than desirable friends and tended to be disinterested in achieving at school. This was possibly done as a way of tempering his father's control over the family. He needed to find an alternative identity that would allow him to gain the respect of the community and prove to his father and family that he wasn't a failure, while still practicing his alternative lifestyle. The struggle seemed to offer him an opportunity to fight the oppressor who was represented in his psyche by the image of his father. Perhaps it gave him a chance to kill two birds with one stone – he could fight the oppressor within and without. He did not have to

conform as the struggle was about being radical and living on the edge for a heroic cause, the cause for justice and freedom. It offered power and a sense of belonging he had never felt within his own family. It gave him a sense of purpose and he did not have to do much, just believing in the cause and going with the flow assured him of acceptance in the group and of his position as an activist.

At the height of his involvement with the struggle he met Nina. She was similar to him in that she was rebelling against her parents' religion by deciding not to commit to her final vows. Being accepted by her could have compensated for the disapproval of his father who was also religious as Nina was- he, a priest and she, a nun. She was different enough in terms of her colour to represent the otherness he felt within himself. It could be hypothesized that it was the ultimate achievement for a black activist to "own" or internalize the oppressor through his relationship with a white woman. It gave him a sense of power against the system and legitimacy as an activist as their relationship flew in the face of the most basic premises of apartheid.

Nina grew up as the "good girl" in her family. She was the one who always did things right. Her sister was the one who was radical and rebellious. Nina pleased her parents by almost over-compensating them for her sister's actions. She surely had to repress much of her natural needs and desires to be the perfect daughter. She entered a convent with the intention of becoming a nun but was "saved" from this fate by letters from her sister, who was in exile in Cuba, encouraging her to search her conscience regarding the political situation in South Africa. She left the convent and met David who appeared to be so different from her by being everything she was not. It seems she had a need to break away from the "goodness" of her religious values. This was similar to David's need to get away from the "goodness" of his father.

They drifted along in the glory of the struggle for almost ten years, in an idealization of both the cause and their relationship. By the time the struggle ended in 1994 they had one child. Suddenly the roles they played in the struggle ended and they were forced to see each other as people and not as comrades in the struggle. They realized that they wanted different things, that they were in fact very different. Nina was interested in having a "normal" life for her child, a childhood similar to her own with all the comforts she had experienced. She wanted to settle down and have a comfortable family life with a husband who worked and provided for his family.

It seems that David was struggling to come to terms with the end of the struggle. His identity had been defined as an activist and he really didn't know how to be anything else. This may have led to feelings of inadequacy similar to those he had experienced as a child in his parents' home.

It is possible that he saw his role in the "normal" lifestyle Nina wanted as too close to the image of his father- good provider and upstanding member of the community. He may have actively or unconsciously resisted being drawn into her idea of how it should be. It is even possible that he started to rebel against her wishes as a way of rebelling against the image of the father he saw in her, an image of someone who wanted him to be who he was not. She became disappointed in him and he in her. She saw him as lazy and unwilling to provide for his family and take responsibility for them. The "laid back" manner she had admired in him before became one of the things she resented most about him. Perhaps she even saw him as a representation of the "bad" side of herself she now wanted to forget in order to move on with her life in the mainstream. He saw her as a nagging bully who wanted him to do things he did not want to do. He missed his place in the struggle. His comrades started to move in different directions while he stayed stuck in the glory of the past. Nina tried her best to carry the load in the hope that things would work out but once their second child arrived and David refused to marry her, was in and out of jobs, and was unwilling to take responsibility, things started to deteriorate.

She did not want the cracks to show, as she was a proud person who had gone against the wishes of her parents by leaving the convent and getting involved with David. Even though her parents liked him they saw him as lazy and irresponsible and resented the fact that he did not provide adequately for their daughter and grandchildren. She did not want to admit to them that she might have made a mistake. Eventually she was forced to turn to them for support and face their comments and criticisms in a submissive way, as she was in need of their support emotionally and financially.

David, who had lost his support network when his activist circle dissipated, seemed to have felt very isolated. In his mind it must have felt as though he had lost everything and that even Nina had abandoned him. He started to become depressed and this made matters worse. He was unable to fulfill his role as a provider and father figure, which led to the children being disrespectful towards him. They were not inclined to listen to him, their mother was the only parental figure and was acting as though she was a single parent. This led to him being relegated to the ranks of a child in the family, as she was the one with the social support, job and income. He was essentially at her mercy and she had decided to exercise her power by giving him an ultimatum to contribute or get out as the problems they were having were having a negative effect on the children, especially Shane who was fast becoming his mother's confidant and support. This led to David becoming more resentful and resistant as he saw in her the oppressor he had been fighting for so long. It was at this point that they entered the therapy.

It was apparent that the problems this couple faced were based primarily in the spousal system. The differences in their backgrounds, personalities and personal styles predisposed David and Nina to have relationship difficulties. The fact that they were not legally married could also have served as a predisposing factor as it caused David to feel insecure in the relationship and caused Nina to be resentful of his refusal to commit to her.

David's retrenchment and the resulting depression caused him to become demotivated and to remain unemployed. This led to major financial problems for the family and Nina felt that she was expected to carry the burden alone. These factors, along with the loss of the struggle cause, served as a precipitant for their underlying differences to become a source of great conflict in their relationship. Suddenly they were unable to tolerate each other and these feelings spilled over onto their children, especially Shane who was at a vulnerable developmental stage. He ended up in a relationship triangle with his parents and was blamed for losing respect and being aggressive.

The financial difficulties resulting from David's unemployment, their inability to communicate their feelings of frustration, their defensiveness, David's ongoing depression, Nina's ultimatum, the triangulation with Shane, and the lack of a cause, served to maintain these difficulties.

Nina worked hard at her job, was quite ambitious and wanted more from life than she was getting. This was in direct contrast to David's seemingly helpless (depressive) approach to life. This served as a major source of frustration for Nina and made her feel unappreciated in their relationship. David felt persecuted and disenfranchised by Nina's seemingly unrealistic expectations of him. Shane's problems precipitated referral.

## Chapter Six

### **Illustrative Material**

The aim of the couple therapy was to provide a safe space for David and Nina to explore their relationship difficulties, express their feelings, and improve their ability to communicate effectively with one another. It was apparent at the start of the therapy that they were not communicating effectively, were very defensive in each other's presence, and that both David and Nina were frustrated and angry for various reasons that had largely remained unarticulated up to that point. Their aim for the therapy was to ease the tension in their relationship and improve their ability to communicate effectively with each other, regardless of whether they stayed together or not, as their children were being negatively affected by their feuding.

Themes will be used to describe the issues highlighted by the therapy. These will be illustrated with extracts and vignettes from the therapy data and discussed in relation to the case.

#### **6. 1. Breakdown in communication**

Right from the start it was clear that there was very poor communication between David and Nina. The following vignette illustrates this.

At the start of the intake session I asked how the family had heard about the clinic in the first place and asked each family member how he or she had heard that they were coming to the Child Guidance Clinic (CGC). Nina explained that she had made the appointment as she knew about the clinic from the time her friend worked there. She said "I come from the days of the UDF struggle and I had a friend working here at that time. My sister also worked at UCT". David said he had been informed by Nina on the day of the appointment that they were due to be there, things had not been discussed with him, he was simply told to be there. She said he knew she was going to do something but she hadn't specified what. The children said their mother had told them that they would be coming to see someone at the CGC and that she had explained why it was necessary for them to seek help.

The above shows that there had been no sharing of information between David and Nina regarding their presence at the clinic. She had decided to come for help and, as the policy of the

CGC is to see the whole family at intake, she simply informed David that he should be there. What came through in this exchange was that she was very annoyed at him, that he irritated and angered her, and that she would have preferred to have nothing to do with him. It also showed that David was being isolated from the family communication process. Nina had explained the situation to the children but had left David out of the discussion. This made him very defensive and cautious regarding his presence there. My impression was that there was a distance between them that neither wanted to cross. They admitted that in the four months preceding their referral to the CGC, their communication had dwindled to “communicating via the children” or in a “very abrupt manner”.

They differed in their understanding of what had led to the breakdown in communication between them. Nina cited financial difficulties resulting from David’s retrenchment a year before as the crux of their problems while David thought that Nina’s unsupportive attitude, his depression, his lack of skills and his loss of financial power were the factors responsible for the breakdown in communication.

## **6. 2. Political involvement in the struggle**

David and Nina had been very involved in the anti-apartheid movement during the struggle years. However, even though David was an activist, he defined himself as a revolutionary whereas Nina described herself as an activist, the difference being that an activist is someone who “encourages and practices direct action, especially in politics” (Heinemann English Dictionary, 1979), while a revolutionary is involved in resisting authority, especially as protest against oppression. The following extracts illustrate this difference in their definitions of themselves.

During the intake session I asked David whether the fact that he had dreadlocks meant that he was a Rastafarian. He answered, “I am a revolutionary, you see. The (Rasta) music interested me, it spoke about equal rights. I was involved in the struggle to right the injustices and show resistance to an illegitimate government”.

During the first couple session Nina explained how she came to be an activist. She said she became a nun because she had always been a very hands-on person and wanted to take a more passive stance. She thought that prayer may be one way of solving the worlds problems but soon felt that she wasn’t doing enough and, after some encouragement from her sister, decided to join the struggle and do something directly, as was more in tune with her nature.

The above extracts show that David and Nina had different approaches to the struggle. Her participation in the struggle was due to a need to take action, to do something because she couldn't just stand by and do nothing. His approach was somewhat different, he took action because of his need to right the injustices he witnessed around him. Her primary goal was action, while his was justice. This fits in with Smith-Dawson's idea that "individual personality traits, levels of political interest, predispositions to act... enter into the political development process" of an individual (1980, p. 92 – 93).

David and Nina had been together in a common cause but their motivations were completely different. At the time of the struggle this did not seem to matter, as the desired outcome was the abolishment of the apartheid system. After the struggle ended it started to matter more and more as this difference in approach generalized to their everyday lives as the overshadowing "cause" was no longer there to camouflage their differences.

### **6. 3. Differences in social identity**

David and Nina defined themselves very differently on a social identity level and these differences were a source of much conflict and frustration in their relationship. During one particular session their differences became the focus of the therapy. The extracts below illustrate this point.

Nina explained that David usually helped Shane with his Afrikaans homework as he is Afrikaans-speaking and she hates Afrikaans. This did not work as Shane usually went to bed in tears as David expected him to speak the language fluently. David was upset that Nina did not want the children to accompany him when he went to visit his Rasta "brethren". She said she refused to go there, as the Rasta's smoke pot and she did not want her children exposed to their lifestyle even though David did not smoke. She said the Rasta women were very narrow-minded and subservient and she could not tolerate this. Nina had rejoined the Catholic Church and was taking the children there with her. She hated the fact that David spent time with the Rastas but refused to go to church with her and the children. David said he had no interest in church but wanted his children to see how other people related to him and to know about his culture as a Rastafarian. I asked Nina what his being a Rasta had meant to her when they first met. She said he had been different, a revolutionary. He interjected "I still am." She said "it was the struggle then and now it's over and there are other things to struggle for." David was also annoyed at what he called Nina's "tactlessness" as he felt she often spoke without thinking. Nina said she was a "real Potchie" (Portuguese) who was not able to

think about other people's feelings when she had something on her mind, whereas David would always keep his feelings to himself and was not assertive.

David and Nina had different social identities and these were coming into conflict with one another and causing them to favour their own group identity above the other's. This links to Tajfel's idea that what an individual gets out of belonging to a social group is a place in society and a positive identity that can only be assured if his/her group is evaluated as superior to other groups (1978). This competition may lead to conflict, as was the case with David and Nina.

On another occasion David said he had embraced his Rastafarian lifestyle during the revolution as the Rasta identity allowed him to escape political interrogation by the security forces and allowed him free access to the township communities. He said, " We were a group of guys who fought for the cause in our own way, we were the cause and the cause was us. Those were the days, the glory days, the days of the struggle." He admitted that it was also very exotic and attractive to be a Rastafarian. He said "For me, being Rasta is just part of my cultural expression. I don't want Nina to be a Rasta with me, just to understand who I am."

David's personal and social identity was so locked up in and defined by the struggle that he was unable to see himself as worthwhile without his role as part of a political group. He clearly missed the support of his activist group and felt unsupported and rejected by what he experienced as Nina's lack of understanding of him. Nina did not share a sense of belongingness to his culture and his persistence in being involved with cultural activities irritated her. The reality of the differences between them was hitting home to her after the struggle ended. The things she had been taught in her culture as a Portuguese woman started to supercede the way of life she had adopted during the struggle years. She was the one with the job and the goals whereas her father had been the one to support the family while her mother's main task was to care for her children when they were small. Nina had a strong support system in the form of her family, especially her sister, but this came at a price and reminded her of what she lacked in life. She defined herself as a "real Potchie" (Portuguese) which means she identified strongly with her own culture and needed the approval of her cultural group. This resulted in a typically in-group/ out-group situation between David's culture and her own, as described by Turner (1999). She started to feel that her culture was superior.



#### **6. 4. Difficulty with regard to roles in the family**

An area of conflict for the couple was the way in which they carried out their different roles in their family. During one session that focused on roles, the following is illustrative of their differences and difficulties.

Nina was annoyed that David was more laid back in his approach to discipline and structure, and that he often let the children do whatever they liked. He said "I'm a Peter Pan, she knows that. If the mailman comes, I'd rather take the 'phoefie' slide than walk. I'm not a cardboard man and my children need to experience that. Besides, you can't play the traditional roles in the set-up we have. I can't fulfill the role of a father to my children because I don't have the financial resources and I don't trust the working world to be consistent in providing what I need."

David said he did not want them to separate but that the way their family was set up was not conducive to a healthy family life. For the second time in the session he said, "I feel emasculated". He said he felt that he was in a position of weakness and he did not know where his role in the family began or ended. He wondered why he was so dispensable whereas at one stage he had made a contribution and was accepted. He wondered how things would be if he was the one in a position of power.

Nina felt that there had been a change in David over the past few years and he was not as "spunky" as he used to be. He had stopped doing the things she once valued in him, the things that had brought them together. He had been a leader, he had gotten things done. Now he just seemed to give up and let life happen to him. She needed him to fulfill his role as a provider for his family, as she was tired of carrying the burden alone.

I felt that David could not separate out his various roles. He thought that the loss of his place in the struggle and as a provider meant he had no right to fulfill his roles in other areas of his life. He felt powerless and experienced Nina as the one with all the power, therefore he let her take on all her roles as well as his own. She resented this, which deepened the conflict between them causing him to become more depressed and to relinquish his roles completely. Nina felt he was just making excuses and withdrew from him. The conflict between them led to a triangular relationship forming with Shane who had to carry the burden of the home with his mother as the man in the house now that his father had been relegated to the role of a child. The power dynamic in the family was obviously skewed.

Oatley (1991) describes a *role* as a “dynamic conception, a pattern that articulates one person’s actions with those of others” (p. 70). He goes on to say that the social scientific concept of a role implies that one gains a sense of who one is from “immediate role-based structures of interaction” (p. 71) and that roles are the basic source of one’s sense of self. David seemed to have lost his sense of self due to his difficulties in fulfilling his roles.

### **6. 5. Coping with role loss and transition**

The following extracts from the therapy illustrate the couple’s varying abilities to cope with role loss and to make transitions after the struggle ended.

#### **David’s narrative with regard to transition**

David said he was not coping well with the loss of his roles and he was unable to take on new and different roles because depression had set in and he felt unsupported. He was feeling the loss of his place in the struggle and his role as a father and provider. This was so especially after his retrenchment led to difficulties resulting from a loss of financial power. He said he realized that he did not have the necessary skills to make a success of a career and felt that he did not have a place in society or in his home. He had tried to start his own business but Nina had insisted that he should see to the financial demands of everyday life and this had stopped him from being able to build his business successfully. He said he could not find a job as he had very “narrow” skills and had no formal qualifications in the field he had previously worked in. He had been in and out of jobs over the years and his last appointment had been an affirmative action position. During the struggle his lack of qualifications did not bother him, as he was very involved in the struggle by helping people in the community with their problems.

David said he had no support system except for the Rastafarian community and, even there, he was seen as different because he did not fully subscribe to their way of life. He admitted that he tended to keep his feelings of loss and depression to himself as he felt it was useless to discuss them with Nina as this just deepened the conflict because she did not understand his situation. This made him feel totally alone and rejected and presented a drastic change from the time when he was one of the “main players” in the struggle.

David’s narrative indicated that he was stuck at the encounter stage of Nicolson’s (1990) transition cycle where his emotions and perceptions held sway. He had not made adequate preparation for encountering the changes that occurred in his life. Perhaps this was due to

fearfulness, reluctance, and unreadiness that are the pitfalls of the transition cycle at the preparation stage (Nicolson, 1990). His shock, rejection and regret at the nature of the changes that occurred caused him to have adjustment and stabilization difficulties.

He often referred to his feelings of depression and worthlessness in the sessions. As Oatley (1991) states, habits and roles help us to be effective by allowing us to control a limited part of our world and to maintain a sense of self in relation to others. In David's case these habits and familiar roles had disappeared suddenly and he was not properly prepared to take on new and unexpected roles. Oatley (1991) says that in this situation we become disorientated in the space between the old familiar roles and the not-yet-learned new ones, which often results in clinical depression. The role loss David experienced must have left him feeling that the world was a strange and scary place, which led to such a feeling of threat to his sense of self that it resulted in depression.

David had to find a new role in society. He was obviously, and by his own admission, depressed and was trying to regain himself and come to terms with the loss of his role in society and with his retrenchment. His job had been almost an extension of the struggle as he had gained it via affirmative action, which affirmed his sense of identity and entitlement as a member of the struggle for freedom and equal rights. David had failed to meet the tasks and goals of the encounter stage of Nicolson's transition cycle, which include coping and being able to make sense of the situation.

Physically, he appeared almost stuck in time. His hair and dress was inappropriate for a man of his age and he was most alive while he engaged with the narrative of who he had been during what he called "the revolution". David clearly had difficulty with change and adjustment. He was finding it hard to make the transition from revolutionary to responsible father and husband. He was also finding it hard to adjust to the loss of his employment a year before. He felt threatened and unsupported by Nina's ultimatum that he contribute financially or "get out". He strongly felt the loss of his group identity and the role he had played in the struggle. He did not want to marry her because he disagreed with the "Roman Dutch" system of marriage yet he felt insecure that he had no legal hold on her and feared that she saw him as dispensable. He was finding it difficult to strike a balance between maintaining his identity and doing what needed to be done to make a success of his life and their relationship.

The interdependence principle of Nicolson's (1990) transition cycle says that what happens at one stage has a powerful effect on what happens next. Therefore David experienced difficulty

with all the stages that followed the encounter stage namely, the adjustment and the stabilization stages. This led to feelings of degradation and grieving for old affects in the adjustment stage and experiencing himself as a failure with strong feelings of fatalism and having to fake his feelings in the stabilization phase. This was in fact so as the following extract shows.

Nina said she felt David had slowed down as he "used to be more revolutionary." David said things had changed in the world, "In the 70's and 80's we did our work by any means necessary and you had the support of people in the struggle. Now there's no support and I don't see the need to rock the boat for causes so much, what's the use anyway?" Nina said she thought he was giving up and that people just ended up using him, "he doesn't get recognized monetarily." She said, "at heart I'm still a socialist but you do need money." David said, "I work without payment in certain situations because I have a vision to have the voices of the people heard. It's my way of making a social contribution." Nina was upset that David was prepared to work for free while she struggled to cope with the children at home and to make ends meet.

It seemed that David had given up but was unable to face the truth of Nina's statements in this regard. He clearly experienced himself as a failure in his current situation and his narrative in the above extract conveyed a fatalism he tried to hide by faking his feelings and saying that he had a honourable reason for not being able to contribute financially instead of admitting that he did not know how to change his situation effectively.

#### Nina's narrative with regard to transition

Nina described herself as an ambitious go-getter who would do whatever it took to get where she was going and to provide for her children. She was a nurse and said she wanted to earn as much as she was worth. Nina said she had successfully made various transitions in her life. She had trained as a teacher and dental nurse and had tried many different things in her life. She therefore did not find it hard to be a part of the struggle and she was able to fit comfortably into a relationship with David despite their racial differences. She knew how to live with others as she had lived in a communal house during the struggle.

Nina was resentful towards David, as he was not living up to her expectations of how her life should be. She was upset at David's lack of personal structure and that he did not communicate effectively with her. She felt he withheld parts of himself and was not

committed to sharing the burden of family life with her. Nina saw David as one of the children in the house. She felt she needed to manage his life as he seemed incapable of doing so himself. This led to her speaking to him in ways that made him feel infantilized, which pushed them even further apart. She desperately wanted an equal partner on whom she could depend and who would be supportive towards her.

The principle of recursion (Nicolson, 1990) states that each one of us is at some point on one or more transition cycles, that movement is continuous, and that each transition experience affects one's experience of future transitions. Nina's past experiences of successfully negotiating transitions helped her to make the transition after the struggle ended. Nina had obviously prepared herself well for transitions in her life. She had fulfilled the goals and tasks of the transition cycle in every stage. At the preparation stage she had developed helpful expectations, motives and feelings towards the changes because she was used to negotiating change effectively. At the encounter stage she had confidence in coping, and enjoyment in making sense of her new situation. At the adjustment stage she was able to make the personal changes required, and to develop her new role successfully by building relationships outside of her activist group. In the stabilization stage she was able to sustain trust in herself and others, was committed to her new role and experienced effectiveness with tasks and people.

Nina's ability to cope with change was strikingly different to David's and this led to many of the difficulties between them. They did not understand each other's point of view and became frustrated and angry as a result. She was ambitious, was professionally qualified and was not depressed by the ending of the struggle. She was able to adjust and stabilize well despite many hardships and opposition from others. She had prepared herself for change beforehand and had adjusted well. She did not understand that David's identity was largely tied up in his role as an activist and she expected him to be able to move on immediately, as she had. She wanted him to move fast in sorting himself out by applying for jobs and paying off his debts, whereas he felt he needed to keep his limitations in mind. He said, "I am different and I want to remain different. I don't want to be like Nina".

#### **6. 6. How being an inter-racial couple in South Africa affected their relationship**

Some of the difficulties David and Nina faced resulted from the fact that they were an inter-racial couple living in a country where race had been the main reason for discrimination. The extract below is an example of this.

Nina said David often accused her of acting like a "wit baas". David said he felt defensive when she treated him like a child as this took him back to the time of oppression when white people treated black people like children. Nina said she wanted him to deal with her as a person and not with her colour or racial identity. She wanted him to support her, if not financially, then practically around the house. He did not feel like doing so as he felt oppressed by her, which led to feelings of resentment on his part. She had recently sent him an ultimatum in the form of a lawyer's letter stating that if he did not contribute to their expenses, he would have to move out of their flat. He felt her sister had influenced her to take this action against him and that she was betraying him. She said he had accused her of turning into someone he didn't know. Nina also said that she was not happy with David's choice of lifestyle, which was Rastafarian. Even though he did not smoke marijuana, he was very involved in the Rasta community. Her mother had been putting pressure on her to get married, as it was against their culture and religion as a Christian to "live in sin". Nina backed this up by saying that David's mother was keen for him to clean up his act by getting himself a job, a regular hairstyle, and marrying her.

David had started to see Nina as his oppressor. He was essentially fighting against and defying her because in his mind she represented the "wit baas" he loathed. It seemed that the differences between them had become more apparent and that she now represented the "other" in his mind whereas before he had not noticed that she was different from him at all. She had represented the difference he sought in being unconventional and alternative. Now he felt that she saw him as a child who had underachieved and whom she had to nag in order to get him to do what she wanted. He felt hurt and undermined by her attitude. He became defensive and withdrew himself from her because he did not trust her anymore, which only served to intensify their difficulties. As described by Wood (1982) the microculture of David and Nina's relationship had broken down. David must have felt that both his negative and positive "face" (as described by Tracy, 1990) was being threatened by the breakdown in their relationship, as his need to be independent and free from being imposed on by others (negative "face"), as well as his need to be regarded positively by others (positive "face") was being threatened.

David was a person who chose not to live his life according to the dominant narratives of society but aligned himself with contradictory or alternative discourses thereby choosing an alternative cultural pattern. Now he was unwilling to fit into Nina's revised narrative for their lives. David experienced Nina's attitude as a "face" threat and felt she was placing negative judgements on his way of life, his creativity, and his culture.

David was obviously reluctant to commit to marrying Nina as she requested. He felt it threatened his identity and would compromise his freedom. He was unsure of what he wanted and unwilling to give up his way of life. The cultural and personal differences that had once brought David and Nina together was now pulling them apart. Their narratives about the past were similar - they had been activists in the anti-apartheid struggle with a common cause and goal, but their narratives about the future were different in so many ways that they had almost given up hope that their relationship could survive. It seemed that they had lost touch with each other after the struggle ended even though they had physically stayed together.

### **6. 7. How the therapy changed their narratives**

As David was stuck in the encounter phase of Nicolson's (1990) transition cycle where social support, flexibility in the system, safety, and the freedom to explore and discover are important aspects for remedying the situation, the therapy focused on providing these elements. With this in mind, David and Nina were encouraged to talk openly about their difficulties and to use the space offered to them if they felt safe to do so.

According to Morgan (2000), narrative therapy is based on the idea that we live our lives according to the stories we tell ourselves and the stories others tell about us. These stories are told in order to make sense of ourselves and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I felt that the stories Nina and David were telling themselves and each other about their relationship and each other was a source of their problems. The following extracts are used to illustrate the changes that occurred in the therapy.

During the first couple session they started to speak directly to each other and I felt that it was at least a start in the communication process that had broken down between them over the preceding months. I asked them whether they wanted to work on their relationship and both agreed that they wanted to. Nina felt that they needed to communicate more effectively with each other. David said he was keen for the process to be of benefit to others that had to learn to help people in a similar situation to their own. He spoke about his family background and the early years of the struggle. The atmosphere in the room seemed to become less tense as he spoke and Nina seemed to warm to him. She seemed to see in him the man she had first known and who she seemed to have forgotten as he had changed so much. After he had spoken she very gently asked him whether he had finished and started telling her story.

During this session I had decided that I needed to take them back to the struggle where it had all started for them. As they told the story of how they met and what had attracted them to each other, they seemed to go back to that time and they started to laugh and smile as they spoke to each other. Their joint narrative about that time had opened up the lines of communication between them. This gave them a chance to hear the narrative of the other as well as to express their own. This approach was based on the social constructionist perspective that identities are not the sole property of the person to whom they are attached but are constructed in the cultural context in which the story is embedded. This therefore externalizes the problem. It serves the purpose of making the person less defensive in the therapy, which is exactly what started to happen to David and Nina as they started to tell their individual and joint stories.

By the second session David and Nina arrived in high spirits. The first thing Nina said as they entered the room was, "We've had a breakthrough". She went on to explain that they had started talking to each other at home after they had been invited out by friends over the weekend and, as they did not have a babysitter, David had offered to stay with the children so that Nina could have a break. This was uncharacteristic of him at this point in their relationship and Nina appreciated it very much. She went out with their friends and had a very enjoyable time. The conversation with the friends highlighted many of David's positive qualities that she had not thought about or experienced for many years. She returned home with a renewed appreciation for the man she had spent the past thirteen years of her life with. She felt that David appreciated her by sacrificing an evening with his friends in order to let her have a well-deserved night out. She returned home feeling good about all the positive things she had heard and remembered about David and her relationship with him. He had told his friends that they were coming to therapy and this had given her hope that he was serious about working at their relationship, as he would normally not have wanted others to know about this type of intervention.

It seemed that new possibilities had opened for David and Nina when they revisited the old memories in the previous session. Their narratives about the past seemed to help them remember the things they admired about each other. They became more accommodating towards each other and this created further opportunities for them to repair their relationship. David's considerate behaviour in letting Nina go out with their friends while he looked after the children made her feel more appreciated and gave her a chance to hear how he was seen by other people whose opinions she valued. The narratives of their friends made her remember the good qualities David possessed so that she did not only focus on the fact that he was



unemployed and not contributing financially. She was able to see him in his role as a comrade and realized that his identity as a member of their activist group had remained intact even while she had lost contact with who he was. Somehow their isolation from their friends after the struggle years had also served to isolate them from each other.

As the therapy progressed and things improved for them the issue of early termination surfaced.

They said they were feeling better about their relationship and that they realized that they still loved each other. Nina was considering ending the therapy as she felt that things had been fixed and that she did not want to be responsible for wasting my time and that of the team behind the mirror. She thought that they needed space to work on their relationship on their own. I explained that my time would never be wasted on them and reflected that their circumstances had not really changed but that their change in attitudes seemed to have made the difference.

David was still cautious about the relationship as he had a fear of being rejected if he did not live up to Nina's expectations. He wanted to continue to come to the sessions with me as he thought they had to find new ways of relating to each other. He was not used to expressing his feelings and was afraid they could go back to having the same problems if they did not continue to work with it. Nina admitted to having doubts that their newfound happiness could last but she was happy that David was taking some responsibility as it allowed her to have a break. David said it would be hard work to make it last but he knew they could do it with the help of therapy as he valued the presence of a third person who was neutral and could mediate when things got difficult.

This was a significantly different standpoint from the one at the beginning of the therapy. David had been the one who was resistant to coming to the therapy at first, now he was the one who wanted to continue. He had obviously found a space where he felt safe and heard and where he could express his feelings in a neutral environment. Now he was not keen to give it up. Nina, on the other hand, was willing to leave, as her nature was to fix things and move on. She felt that things between them had been fixed and that they did not need the space any longer and someone else could make better use of it. However, she still experienced nagging doubts from time to time that caused her to stay in the therapy.

I asked them if they saw each other differently as opposed to how they saw each other before starting therapy. David said that when things got "derailed" they had found

defensive ways of coping. Nina said she thought that they had been on "different paths" before but that they were now "on the same side". David said he was hopeful whereas before he had been preparing himself to be on his own. He was concerned that his unemployed status could still cause a problem, as he did not want to let Nina down. Nina said there were still things she was afraid to discuss with him such as the matter of a "bakkie" (van) they had had for many years that was not working but that David refused to dispose of. She wanted everything to be fixed quickly while he felt cautious. She wanted a "solution" while he wanted a "resolution".

It seemed that they were starting to see what had gone wrong in their interaction with each other. They were more aware of what caused their difficulties and negative reactions to one another. They were also aware that there were still problems they had to face as they were so different. However, they seemed to understand these differences better and were more accommodating with regard to them.

Small changes in their situation started to increase their hopefulness that things were getting better. David was doing some freelance work, delivering magazines and painting murals and was thinking of starting a business along these lines. Nina said she had stopped nagging David to find steady work but encouraged him to use his potential. David said he was learning to get out of throwing "the three-year olds tantrum" and that therapy was definitely giving them a different way of managing the process. Shane had been given more chores to do and the roles within the family were shifting. They seemed more confident in their abilities as parents as opposed to before when they had both been feeling inadequate due to their relationship difficulties. They reflected on how things used to be before coming to the therapy and felt their situation was much improved. David said he had previously felt depressed about the circumstances of his life and rejected by Nina. He had the need for support but instead he got an ultimatum. Nina said she had felt angry because she did not understand his situation, as he never expressed his need for support to her at that time. They had isolated themselves from each other and had felt resentful and misunderstood.

There were many occasions when the questions I asked visibly increased the tension in the room but I always maintained the stance that they were able to resolve and manage their problems. Soon they were able to see how some of their roles overlapped and how their different roles impacted on each other. They were able to look at their differences in an open and constructive manner. They accepted that they were different and realized that it did not have to present as a

major issue. Winslade and Monk (1998) suggest that the narrative therapist needs to maintain an attitude of optimism that the client already possesses the ability to resolve or manage the problem. She needs to be respectful of the fact that the client is someone who has knowledge and must maintain a tentative stance rather than one of authority and knowing. The therapist should use curiosity and a position of deliberate ignorance in order to explore the world of the client instead of assuming to know what the client is about without exploration. The therapist enters into a co-authorship with the client through negotiation and power sharing in creating the preferred story. This is what I tried to do during this therapeutic intervention and it had the desired effect of letting them do their share of the work.

They were increasingly able to bring issues to the therapy that they had never explored before for fear of conflict. There were still many issues they were not willing to discuss at home without my presence as they felt the space at home was not safe without a neutral person to mediate. The extract below illustrates such an issue.

David felt that their relationship needed a period of recovery and he wanted them to keep the pitfalls in mind. Nina felt that their relationship was very strong and that, at this stage, money was their only problem. Nina had elaborate plans around taking out a second bond in order to settle David's outstanding debt. David was less happy with this idea but had not had the courage to say so in case it spoiled their newfound happiness. He felt safe enough in the therapy session to express his feelings. He said he wanted the chance to sort out his own problems and he did not appreciate Nina always taking over. For the first time he was able to say how he really felt within the relationship, while Nina actually listened to what he was saying. She seemed to understand his need to do things himself and was willing to let him do so.

David, who had been the one who was reluctant to come to the therapy at first, was the one who kept encouraging Nina to return at every session. She often felt the need to cancel when things got too difficult or went well, even though she thought the sessions helped them. David valued the sessions because he believed it offered him a neutral space in which to express himself and explore issues. He became less defensive and was able to see things from Nina's perspective.

Nina gained insight into how her attitude was affecting David. She understood more clearly that it was hard for him to adjust to change. She realized that they were different and learnt to value those differences as she realized that was what made life more interesting for the children. She

had to learn to give up some of her power in order to allow David to find his role in the family and in society. The sessions gave them an opportunity for "facework", which involves communication that acknowledges the identity of the other, as well as the self in interaction (Tracy, 1990).

Another extract illustrates how they used the therapeutic space.

They said they found the therapy space useful for clarifying issues in a safe, contained way. Nina stressed the need for structure in the children's lives and said that David had no structure in his own life. He said, "Nina, you are you and I am I. There are things I do better than you and there are things you do better than me. It is not a competition." Nina listened attentively while David expressed how he felt. I affirmed them for being able to relate to each other in such a constructive manner.

They were able to voice their objections and clarify their expectations of each other in the therapy. They spoke about things they did not dare broach at home for fear of it ending in conflict. They thought about things they had not thought about and gained a better understanding of each other's perspectives. They realized that they were different in their styles of coping and that they needed to work on accommodating each other's differences. When old issues started resurfacing they were able to cope and work through it by using the skills they had learnt in the therapy. We discussed what had changed since they started coming to therapy and how the way they related to each other had changed. They concluded that the improvement had come about as they now communicated more effectively and, as a result, were able to understand each other better. They felt that the sessions were valuable, as they couldn't walk away from the situation or become too unreasonable as they would do at home.

During the therapy it emerged that their roles in the family needed to change. They realized that they needed to find new ways of relating to each other as parents.

David said he was still feeling like he was being treated like a child. He thought Nina saw him as someone who had underachieved and would only find him acceptable if he had a steady nine to five job. He felt he could not do this, as it would kill his creativity. He did admit that he lacked clarity and vision but felt that it was due to his depression at being unemployed. He thought that Nina had not given him enough time to get over his retrenchment. He felt he needed to regain his skills as those he had used during the "revolution" were no longer effective and he felt inadequate and had a fear of failure. He

said he felt infantilized as Nina was the one who made the rules in the house and she was not giving him a chance to take on his role as a father in the house. He said the children often complained to Nina about him when he asserted his authority over them and she would then confront him about this.

I expressed the idea that they were essentially a new couple and the status quo of only Nina being in charge and responsible had to change. David had to take some responsibility if he wanted to be part of the decision-making process within the family, while Nina had to be prepared to relinquish some of her power if she wanted David to share the responsibility. Each one of them, including the children would have to adjust to their new roles within the family. David needed to reestablish himself as a father as the respect the children had for him seemed to have been compromised while he and Nina were having problems. Nina had to realize that she was not a single parent and that she should not use the children as her allies in her fights with David.

At the end of the sixth session, we discussed termination. There was to be a one-month gap between this session and the final one.

Their attitude towards each other was good and they discussed having sessions at home to talk through their difficulties and differences. Nina felt that they had internalized me as the therapist sufficiently in order to continue the process on their own. She said that even though work was hectic, she was feeling very happy, secure and loved at home. David had some doubts about having such a long break and wanted to know if they could call if they had a problem. I assured him that they could do so at any time. They were feeling strong as a couple and as parents. They felt that their children were better adjusted than before and were feeling secure. At the end of the session Nina touched David's face and said, "You're sweet, hey?" and I said, "You didn't know that about him before". We all laughed.

This illustrates the point made by White and Epston (1990) that taking apart (deconstructing) discourses can lead to new ways of being and living.

In the termination session we revisited the reasons why they had come for therapy, what they had learnt from the process, and why it seemed to have worked.

David said he was not depressed any more and that he now knew that he had many skills and was a valuable person. He just needed to find a way to market himself better.

He felt supported by Nina and requested that she allow him more space for cultural expression. She was supportive but was unsure of how such an arrangement could work practically. We discussed how important it was for them to keep in touch with each other and to make sure the channels of communication remained open. They felt they would be able to cope but they seemed somewhat insecure about terminating. I reassured them that I thought they would manage well on their own if they used what they had learnt about themselves, each other, and their relationship in the therapy.

I told them that even though I would not be at the clinic for much longer, they would always have the services of the Child Guidance Clinic at their disposal.

During the time of the therapy Nina and David still encountered many problems along the way. They were discovering new dimensions to each other and themselves all the time. David was able to recognize that he was a valuable person with skills and options and that he could make a new place for himself in the world. He started to regain his role as the father in his home and took on more responsibility for providing materially for his family. His problems were by no means over but he regained the courage to go out and find work, albeit casual work. His contribution was small but it served to relieve some of the pressure from Nina and made her appreciate that he was trying. This renewed her respect for him and she was able to be supportive towards him. She was able to limit her family's involvement in their lives, as she felt supported by David. It gave him back his self-respect and the respect of his family. By the time the therapy sessions had come to an end they seemed to have internalized the "therapist" and were able to utilize their internalized mediation skills. They went away hopeful and I was hopeful for them. The therapy had offered them a start, now the rest was up to them.

### **6. 8. The therapeutic alliance**

According to Winslade and Monk (1998), narrative therapy is characterized by establishing a strong relationship with the client, which is based on trust. David and Nina both seemed to trust the therapeutic relationship even though David resented the fact that Nina always sought advice from other people, especially her family. He said he felt happy with the therapy, as it was not "like somebody sticking their nose in". He seemed to trust me enough to realize that I was not partial to either one of them. Having been involved in the struggle myself, I was well able to relate to what they were talking about. I liked them both equally and found it easy to work with them in a neutral way. They opened up to me and to each other and it felt like the work had begun.

The fact that I liked both David and Nina equally allowed me to establish an equal relationship with both of them. This certainly seemed to help, as neither seemed to feel threatened or attacked in the therapy. Each saw me as their therapist and did not feel that I was choosing sides against either one. According to Rait (2000), it is a central requirement for couple therapy that a therapeutic alliance be formed between the couple and therapist. This is different from the alliances formed in individual therapy, as it requires the formation of multiple alliances and the adoption of conceptual frameworks involving triangles. This can often be difficult work as most times at least one partner may be a reluctant participant in the therapy and therefore there are often varying levels of commitment involved. Even though David had been reluctant to enter therapy, it was never difficult for me to connect with him and he was always cooperative even during difficult parts of the work.

Rait (2000) suggests that the therapist has to establish a working relationship with each partner and that this relationship building is a very important yet idiosyncratic facet of the therapist's skill. Couples engaged in conflict often coerce therapists into various unwanted roles such as judge, expert, or adjudicator. I have no doubt that my ability to identify with each of them on various levels was a contributing factor to the success of the therapy. I identified with Nina as a strong, ambitious woman who liked to get the job done and with David as a coloured person who was coping with life after being an activist. They said I had a good presence and gave them hope with my positive attitude.

As the end of the session approached, David physically turned away from me and Nina asked for my telephone number and wanted to know if we could go out for coffee now that the therapy was ending. At the end of the session she hugged me and so did David. I felt a great sense of loss at letting them go but I knew it was time to let them. Very little actually changed for David and Nina in terms of tangible material changes but the therapy seemed to open up a way for them to find each other again. They had taught themselves better ways of communicating and interacting.

## Chapter Seven

### **Discussion**

The theory reviewed in this dissertation proved useful in helping me think about Nina and David and their situation in a structured and critical way. It offered me a basis for understanding how various factors impacted on their lives and how this led to the problems with which they presented. It also helped me understand why the narrative therapy offered to them as a couple had a positive effect on repairing their relationship. In this chapter I shall briefly discuss some of these issues.

David and Nina's involvement in the struggle as activists formed a significant part of their identities and at first I tended to place them together under the label "activist", seeing them as the same in their role in the struggle. However, it soon became apparent through hearing their narratives that their identities as activists had developed in very different ways. Their personal, social, and cultural identities affected the way they saw themselves as activists. Nina saw herself as an ambitious, go-getter who was willing to do whatever it took to achieve her goals quickly, while David saw himself as a laid-back, alternative thinker who preferred to do things when he was ready and when he thought the time was right. Breakwell suggests that "It is difficult to see how personal identity can be defined except in terms of its social history and context" (1983, p. 9). While I agree with this statement, I feel it is also true that one's personal identity has a significant effect on one's social identity and context because how you see yourself as an individual will impact on how you see yourself in society.

For Nina and David the impact of the differences in their personal histories did not become clear while they were involved in the struggle. Their involvement in the struggle had the effect of covering, or even romanticizing, these differences. Turner suggests that "social identity is sometimes able to function to the relative exclusion of personal identity" (1984, p. 527). It is the mechanism that changes interpersonal behaviour (behaviour between individuals) into inter-group behaviour (behaviour between different social/political groups). It is my understanding that when a common identity is assumed by members of a group (in David and Nina's case - the identity of activists), this has the effect of making the group stronger, as the differences between individuals become insignificant. The attention of that particular group is focused on the differences between their in-group and other out-groups. This situation changed for David and Nina once the struggle ended.



The struggle for freedom officially ended in 1994 but for many people the role they had assumed as activists came to an abrupt end with the unbanning of the ANC in 1990. This was quickly followed by the release of Nelson Mandela and there was rapid change from that point onwards. Even though peace negotiations in South Africa had been in progress for a while before the struggle ended, it is my personal experience that many people who had participated in the struggle were largely unprepared for the redundancy of their role as activists. Very few had expected things to move as swiftly as they had. Suddenly Nina and David found themselves as individuals from different race group instead of as activists from the same political group. They had moved from their common in-group to opposing out-groups.

Now it became strikingly clear that they had different styles and wanted different things in life. Nina found herself becoming increasingly irritated with David's way of doing things, as it did not fit in with her vision of how her life should be. She had become involved in the struggle to help solve the problem of apartheid. She went into the situation expecting things to change and when they did, she felt a sense of accomplishment and was prepared to move on to the next challenge. Her attitude to the end of the struggle can be summed up in what she once said in relation to David's reminiscence of struggle times, "The struggle is over, now there are other things to struggle for". For her the next challenge was to build a safe and secure home environment for her children. She had faced many changes in her life and her ability to negotiate transition was effective. She was well prepared for the changes she faced, as she was qualified to do a variety of jobs and she proceeded to involve herself in various other organizations such as the Catholic Church and her union at work.

David had immersed himself in the cause and had allowed it to shape his identity as a revolutionary. The struggle became his way of life and he had not prepared himself for the time when it would end. It almost seems that he had expected it to go on forever. He was unable to negotiate the various stages of Nicolson's (1990) transition cycle effectively, as he had not prepared himself adequately for the changes that occurred. He was under-qualified for the job he had and had never really involved himself with organizations outside of those connected to the struggle. He was stuck at the encounter stage of the transition cycle and was experiencing the pitfalls and problems inherent in this phase. This included shock at being placed in an unfamiliar situation, rejection of or by the new system, and regret about the situation left behind. This model describes David's process very well - the role he had played in the struggle was the only one he felt confident in fulfilling, once it ended he became deflated and depressed. He rejected Nina's new view of how their life together should be but he did not have a new plan of his own. He felt rejected by the new system as he felt as though he did not fit in anymore. He reminisced

about the struggle years and expressed regret that it was over, even though one would have thought that was what he would have wanted as an activist. Instead he felt as though he had lost control over his life.

Oatley (1991) suggests that habits and roles help us to be effective by allowing us to control a limited part of our world and to maintain a sense of self in relation to others. If these habits and familiar roles cease to exist, and we have to suddenly take on new and unexpected roles, we become disorientated and depressed in the space between the old, familiar roles and the not-yet-learned ones. The loss of role David experienced caused him to become depressed. This depression worsened when he was retrenched from his job because he was unable to find another job due to his limited skills. He became fearful of rejection and his depressive thoughts and feelings added to his inability to go out and find another job. This led to financial difficulties that caused Nina to become resentful, as she saw him as unwilling to make the effort to contribute financially. This led to a breakdown in communication between them and resulted in her ultimatum that he should contribute or leave. This caused him to feel even more insecure in the relationship and resulted in a vicious cycle of misunderstanding and unhappiness for them both.

Nina came from a strong Portuguese cultural background and she enjoyed the support of her family regardless of their differences, while David did not really seem to fit in anywhere. He had isolated himself from his family in favour of pursuing his involvement in the struggle. He was a marginal member of the Rastafarian community but did not really fit in there, as he did not follow all their lifestyle practices. David and Nina's identities as people from different cultural groups added to their difficulties. David was a coloured man who embraced a Rastafarian lifestyle, he was clear that he did not want to be anything different. He saw himself as a revolutionary, a resistor of oppression. Nina was a white ex-Roman-Catholic-nun who essentially came from the "other side of the track". She had a very assertive manner and once she started to express her dissatisfaction with David's inability to adjust, he started to see her as the oppressor he had been resisting for so long and whose presence he now seemed to miss. He became resistant and defensive within their relationship.

He was full of self-doubt at this stage and Nina's intolerance and perceived lack of support confirmed his negative feelings about himself. He interpreted Nina's irritation and intolerance as a confirmation of his feelings of being a failure. Murry addresses the issue by asking the question,

" When individuals look into a romantic partner's eyes, what image of themselves do they see? Does the image that reflects back affirm their hopes and inspirations for themselves

and their relationships? Or does it confirm their own self-doubts or uncertainties?" (2000, p. 173).

David and Nina's realization of their differences and the feelings that resulted from this formed the basis of the conflict that developed between them. According to Falicov (1986), couples can minimize or maximize any similarity or difference at different times for different purposes. In the case of an interracial relationship where the partners are romantically and therefore emotionally involved this difference can be a real source of disharmony and can exacerbate the usual pressures of a partnership, leading to conflict. Conflict seems to highlight people's awareness of the other's differences and these differences in turn may serve as the basis for further conflict. In a situation where there is a ready made difference, such as a racial difference, people tend to blame that difference for the difficulties experienced in a relationship. This forms a "ready-made excuse" for the conflict.

Narrative therapy calls this "ready made excuse" a "thin description" of a problem. This means that people often do not consider deeper reasons for their conflict but tend to use the obvious explanation, which in Nina and David's case were their racial and cultural differences. According to Morgan (2000), narrative therapy is based on the idea that we live our lives according to stories we tell ourselves and those others tell about us. These stories are told in order to make sense of ourselves and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Many of our dominant stories have their roots in our childhood contexts and are co-authored by those around us. These dominant stories constantly influence the way we see the world and ourselves, and are often at the root of our problems. Having come from such divergent cultural backgrounds, Nina and David were using the differences in their dominant narratives as a "thin description" to blame each other for their problems. The narrative therapy offered them an opportunity to externalize the problem and to disengage from the cycle of blame and conflict they were in. It offered them a space in which to explore the deeper causes of their conflict that had to do with their roles as individuals, parents, and partners rather than as members of different cultural groups. Through hearing their own and each other's narratives they were able to understand their situation better.

According to White and Epston (1990), Edward Brunner argued that the stories people tell do not merely describe their realities but actually shape their realities. Once David and Nina started to tell themselves different stories about themselves and each other, things began to improve for them. They started to feel differently towards each other even though things had not changed materially for them at first. This gave them the opportunity for new stories to emerge and these new stories shaped their reality. Sometimes they used the old stories of the struggle to help them

along but mostly they found a way to relate to each other in a more meaningful way. They were able to make their fears and feelings known to me and to each other in a way that they never felt safe to before. David started to feel better about himself and Nina developed a better understanding of him and their problems. He took time to be kind and considerate towards her and she supported him by encouraging him to do his best. He found casual work and took on some of the financial burden. They improved in their roles as parents and partners. David began to feel that he had a role to play in his family and his depression lifted, leading to a new cycle forming for them. Their son's behaviour improved and their daughter was more relaxed around them.

The narrative therapy and the alliance formed between myself and both of them as individuals provided them with a safe and neutral space in which to explore their difficulties. According to Rait (2000), it is a central requirement for couple therapy that a therapeutic alliance be formed between the couple and therapist. This is different from the alliances formed in individual therapy, as it requires the formation of multiple alliances and the adoption of conceptual frameworks involving triangles. This can often be difficult work as most times at least one partner may be a reluctant participant in the therapy and therefore there are often varying levels of commitment involved. At first David was reluctant to enter into therapy but once he realized that I was willing to listen to both of them in an unbiased way and to guide them to engage in constructing alternative narratives in a space that was unthreatening to him, he was the one who was eager to continue and encouraged Nina to return to therapy when she wanted to terminate.

The success of the intervention was evidenced by the significant shifts that occurred in their narratives and attitudes toward each other and their situation. They developed a more balanced way of carrying out their roles as partners and parents, and issues outlined as problems during the initial stages of the therapy improved or became less problematic.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), case studies may not fit in with the positivistic view of generalization but have much to contribute to the understanding of unique, personal experiences occurring in uncontrived social situations. They may be used as a basis for naturalistic generalizations. The concept of naturalistic generalization is described by Stake who goes on to say, "as readers recognize essential similarities to cases of interest to them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalization" (2000, p. 23). It is my considered opinion that the theory and process as outlined in this dissertation offers a useful tool for therapists working with struggle activists in post-apartheid South Africa. It offers the therapist a framework for thinking

about the client/s in a structured and organized way. It may very well prove as useful for working with an individual client as it has with this couple.

There are limitations to this study. The therapeutic process described was short term and therefore offers limited data for analysis. Further research into identity change in post-struggle South Africa is needed to confirm or interrogate the findings of this study. If the process had continued over a longer period, new and different issues and insights might have emerged that may have changed the framework of the intervention. The sustainability of the changes that occurred in David and Nina's relationship as a result of the intervention remains in question. Due to the fact that I was leaving the Child Guidance Clinic shortly after the therapy terminated, I was unable to offer them follow up sessions in order to track their progress and offer them help if they needed it. However, Winslade and Monk (1998) suggest that one of the most important tasks of the narrative therapist is to prepare the client/s ahead of time for when the problems attempt to come back. Nina and David knew what indicated the return of their difficulties and knew that they could seek help again.

Despite all these limitations I do consider the therapy to have been successful as it offered David and Nina a respite from their difficulties at a time when their relationship was in such trouble that it was affecting their children's well-being and the existence of their relationship. Hopefully it has taught them different, more effective ways of coping with their changing roles in the new South Africa.

***And one man in his time plays many parts  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant...***

William Shakespeare, As You Like It

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